

—when she sees her bear fighting mine? Betcher hundred dollars my bear kills Tara!"

"To-morrow," said David. "I'll bet to-morrow. Where's the shack?"

David pulled his hat over his eyes. Brokaw told him what he and Hauck had planned. The bear in the cage belonged to him—Brokaw. A big brute; fierce; a fighter. Hauck and he were going to bet on his bear because it would surely kill Tara. Make a big clean-up, they would; and they needed the money. The girl had almost spoiled their plans by going away with Tara. And he—Mac—was a devil of a good fellow for bringing her back!

David leaned over and gave Brokaw a jocular slap, forcing a laugh out of himself. "Prettiest kid I ever saw! How did it happen? She hasn't belonged to you very long, eh?"

"Long time, long time," replied Brokaw. "Years ago."

Suddenly he lowered the cup so forcibly that half the liquor spilled.

"Hauck said she didn't," he growled. "Said she didn't belong to me any more, an' I'd have to pay for her keep! I did. I gave him a lot of gold!"

"I should have killed him, shouldn't I, Mac—killed him an' took her?" cried Brokaw huskily. "Like you killed the breed for that long-haired she-devil over at Copper Cliff!"

"I—don't—know," said David slowly, praying that he would not say the wrong thing now. "I don't know what claim you had on her, Brokaw. If I knew—"

"She's mine—been mine ever since she was a baby," he confided, leaning across the table. "Good friend give her to me, Mac—good friend, but a fool!" He chuckled. "Dam' fool!" he repeated. "Any man's a dam' fool to turn down a pretty woman, eh, Mac? An' she was pretty, he says. My girl's mother, you know, so she must have been pretty."

"What happened?" David urged.

"Bucky, my friend, in love with that woman—O'Doone's wife," resumed Brokaw. "Dead crazy, Mac. Crazier'n you were over the breed's woman, only he didn't have the nerve. Just moped around waiting, keeping out of O'Doone's way. Trapper, O'Doone was—or a Company runner; forget which. Anyway, he went on a long trip in winter, and got laid up with a broken leg long way from home. Wife and baby alone, an' Bucky sneaked up one day and found the woman sick with fever—out of her head. An' if she didn't think he was her husband!"

His eyes half closed.

"BUCKY got her to run away with him," continued Brokaw, "her and the kid, while she was still out of her head. Bucky even got her to write a note, he said, telling O'Doone she was sick of him an' was running away with another man. Bucky didn't give his own name, of course. An' the woman didn't know what she was doing. They started west with the kid.

"But all the time Bucky was afraid! He dragged the woman on a sledge, and snow covered their trail. He hid in a cabin a hundred miles from O'Doone's, an' it was there the woman come to her senses. Bucky says she was like a mad woman, and that she ran screeching out into the night, leaving the kid with him. He couldn't find her. She never came back.

"He waited till spring, keeping that kid, and then he made up his mind to get it back to O'Doone in some way. He sneaked back to where the cabin had been, and found nothing but char there. It had been burned. Oh, it was funny!

"And after all his trouble he hadn't dared to take O'Doone's place with the woman. Said it was conscience. Bah! He was a fool. You don't get a pretty woman like that very often, eh?"

"Came west, Bucky did—with the kid," he went on. "Struck my cabin on the Mackenzie a year later. Told me all about it. Then one day he sneaked away and left her with me, begging me to put her where she'd be safe. I did. Gave her to Hauck's woman, and told her Bucky's story. Later Hauck came over here. Three years ago I come down from the

Yukon, and saw the kid. Pretty? Gawd, she was! And she was mine. I told 'em so.

"Mebbe the woman would have cheated me, but I had Hauck on the hip because I saw him kill a man when he was drunk—an' he didn't know Marge was the O'Doone baby. I told him a big lie—told him the kid died, an' that I'd heard the woman had killed herself, and that O'Doone was in a lunatic asylum. Mebbe he *did* have a conscience, the fool! Went away soon after that."

"And this man Bucky—what was his other name, Brokaw?"

Brokaw's voice came in a husky whisper:

"Tavish!"

THE next instant Hauck was in the open door. He did not cross the threshold at once, but stood there for perhaps twenty seconds, his gray, hard face looking in on them.

"I'm sorry," David said. "He's terribly drunk."

"Yes, he's drunk," Hauck said, his voice hard as rock. "Better come to the house. I've got a room for you. There's only one bunk in here—McKenna."

He dragged out the name slowly, a bit tauntingly, it seemed to David. And David laughed. Might as well play his last card well, he thought.

"My name isn't McKenna," he said. "It's David Raine. He made a mistake, and he's so drunk I haven't been able to explain."

Without answering, Hauck backed out of the door. It was an invitation for David to follow.

Hauck led him to a room almost opposite the one Marge had said belonged to her.

"This will be your room while you are our guest," he said.

He tried to speak affably. "Make yourself at home," he added. "We'll have breakfast in the morning with my niece."

David was glad that he turned away without waiting for an answer. He did not want to talk with Hauck now. He wanted to turn over in his mind what he had learned from Brokaw.

It was Tavish, then—that half mad hermit in his mice-infested cabin—who had been at the bottom of it all! The discovery did not amaze him profoundly. He had never been able to dissociate Tavish from the picture, unreasoning though he confessed himself to be.

His mind leaped back to that scene, years ago, when Marge O'Doone's mother had run shrieking out in the storm of night to escape Tavish, even leaving her baby girl in her madness and terror. Tavish believed she had died. *But she had not died!*

He was filled with a great desire to go at once to the girl and tell her of this wonderful new fact that had come into her life, and he found himself suddenly at the door of his room, with his fingers on the latch.

He thought of Father Roland, of the mysterious change that came over him that night of Tavish's death, of the mystery-room in the Château where he worshipped at the shrine of a woman and a child who were gone—of—

He clenched his hands and stopped himself. Tavish, the woman, the girl—Father Roland!

He was still pacing his room when the creaking of the door stopped him. In another moment Marge O'Doone stood inside. He had not seen her face so white before. Her eyes were big and glowing darkly—pools of quivering fear, of wild and imploring supplication. She ran to him, and clung to him with her hands at his shoulders, her face close to his.

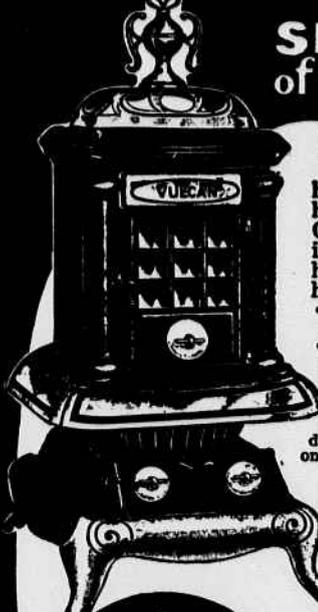
"Sakewawin—dear Sakewawin—we must go—we must hurry—to-night!"

She was trembling, fairly shivering against him. He put his arms about her.

"What is it, child?" he whispered, his heart choking him suddenly. "What has happened?"

To be continued next week

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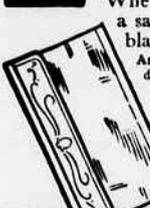
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